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Chairman: Mr. Ball (Vice-Chairman) ..... (New Zealand)

Contents

Agenda item 105: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions

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In the absence of Mr. Hachani (Tunisia), Mr. Ball (New Zealand), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 11.10 a.m.

Agenda item 105: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees: questions relating to refugees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/53/12 and Add.1, A/53/325, A/53/328, A/53/413 and A/53/486)

1. **Mrs. Ogata** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) thanked the General Assembly for re-electing her to the post of High Commissioner for a third mandate which would, at her request, end on 31 December 2000.

2. A number of problems around the world were reasons for concern, including conflicts, particularly in Africa, the slowdown in some peace processes, financial turmoil, which had fuelled widespread social crises, and globalization, which was bringing about major changes in the economy, technology and information. Those phenomena had a bearing on the work of international organizations, including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Nevertheless, the political resolve shown in tackling the crisis in Kosovo gave rise to the hope that the international community would continue to carry out joint action in support of refugees.

3. While in previous years an increased trend towards repatriation had given rise to the hope that refugee problems would be reduced, a new pattern of refugee problems had emerged. Emergencies, more limited in size but more complex in nature, were due to the increase in the number of conflicts, which slowed down or even completely blocked solutions to refugee problems.

4. In Kosovo, international efforts had resulted in the containment of the conflict, the definition of minimum conditions for the security of civilians and the establishment of a framework aimed at verifying compliance with such conditions; that had encouraged many people displaced within Kosovo to return to their homes. It was not likely, however, that significant returns would occur until security had been guaranteed both to returnees and to all those affected by the conflict. The complexity of the situation in Kosovo meant that UNHCR must work in close coordination with a number of actors. Unlike the Verification Mission, her Office concentrated on humanitarian tasks and, in particular on the rehabilitation of housing, which it considered to be a priority need.

5. The efforts made by the international community to resolve the Kosovo crisis should not weaken its commitment to achieve the objectives set by the Dayton Peace Accords, particularly minority returns, a task whose completion required political energy and sufficient material resources. As the targets for minority returns had not been met in 1998, they must be met in 1999, by creating an environment in which minority returns were not forced on other communities, but were accepted by them.

6. In Africa, displacement in the Great Lakes region had had far-reaching consequences for security and socio-economic development. In May 1998, a ministerial meeting convened by the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and UNHCR had been held in Kampala to discuss regional refugee problems; the participants had reaffirmed their support for the refugee protection principles embodied in the 1969 OAU Convention, stressing the need to ensure the security of displaced persons and to sustain returnee reintegration, on the recommendation of the Secretary-General, UNHCR had begun to cooperate closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations on proposals to establish stand-by arrangements to address insecure refugee situations. Attention must also be paid to other support solutions, such as capacity-building for the local police and judiciary, training, provision of equipment and monitoring.

7. West Africa had also recently experienced dramatic refugee movements caused by fighting in Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. In Sierra Leone, for example, appalling acts of violence, from which neither women nor children had been spared, had forced almost half a million Sierra Leoneans to seek refuge in neighbouring countries; those countries had generously given them asylum in spite of their limited resources.

8. Nevertheless, West Africa had been able to resolve or contain conflicts at the regional level in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea-Bissau. International support, however, both for the peacemaking efforts and for the rehabilitation and development programmes, had not been sufficient. To resolve conflicts and seek solutions to refugee problems, the international community should mobilize global solidarity.

9. Although limited means constrained its efforts, UNHCR could assist in improving the sharing of responsibilities. Solidarity towards refugees could be achieved in different ways, such as the granting of asylum to people threatened by persecution or violence and the resettlement of refugees. Protection and assistance programmes, particularly in developing countries, continued to be a key element of solidarity towards refugees. At the recent session of the Executive Committee, delegations had emphasized the sharing of responsibilities while deploring

the insufficient attention paid by the international community to that endeavour.

10. The political, social and environmental consequences of the successive refugee crises had been reflected in substantial economic costs. In a world being profoundly changed by globalization, forced human displacement was everyone's problem, not just the problem of countries receiving refugees or returnees. Global solidarity could take many forms: not only financial and material assistance, but also support in the areas of legislation, training, education, environmental rehabilitation and public awareness, with UNHCR acting directly or serving as a catalyst.

11. As global solidarity must also be based on refugee protection, UNHCR had made efforts to reach out to governments, and had launched a campaign to promote universal accession to refugee conventions and the implementation of refugee law in national legislation by the year 2000.

12. Refugee protection was not purely a legal undertaking; it also required material assistance as an indispensable means of support. Above all, protecting refugees required being with them in the field, as the physical and psychological violence against civilians, particularly women and children, made clear. UNHCR would continue to pay special attention to their protection problems.

13. In cases such as the Kosovo crisis, refugees, internally displaced persons and other war-affected persons faced a similar plight and had similar needs — for security, assistance and information about the situation in their place of origin, so as to be able to make informed choices about returning home. Contrary to what had frequently been argued, dealing with non-refugee displaced persons did not undermine the core mandate of UNHCR; that approach had been authorized by the General Assembly and the Secretary-General on several occasions. UNHCR worked on behalf of displaced persons in close cooperation with other agencies of the United Nations system and with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

14. In the past few years, UNHCR had had to be involved not only in conflicts, but also in post-conflict situations, particularly in the context of the large-scale return of refugees to their home countries; its involvement in that area had been requested by the Executive Committee and by the Third Committee, which had both recognized the need to promote repatriation and the reconciliation of divided communities, in order to prevent further displacement.

15. The Office's efforts, however, had been hampered by a growing gap between humanitarian and development assistance. In Rwanda, for example, while humanitarian assistance was declining for lack of funds, development activities were slow to start owing to insecurity and the limited capacities of the Government. UNHCR did not want to do development work and had limited expertise in that area. Its objective was to ensure that immediate humanitarian needs were covered. The Office hoped that development partners could intervene quickly and effectively in order to allow UNHCR and other humanitarian partners to focus on their area of expertise: the return and reintegration of refugees, and providing support to their communities during the very crucial phase in which people started living together again.

16. A first priority was to maintain and, if possible, strengthen the Office's capacity to prepare for and respond to refugee emergencies. That capacity had allowed UNHCR to deploy more staff in Kosovo shortly after hostilities had been suspended. When unrest had broken out in Indonesia, UNHCR had been able to train governmental and non-governmental organizations in countries that might receive refugee influxes.

17. A second priority was to ensure that the Office could work with a more solid funding base. Contributions should be made on a timely basis and should be relatively predictable; earmarking should be kept to reasonable levels to enable UNHCR to address changing situations. The Office remained committed to continuing to improve the management of its resources and refine mechanisms to monitor, inspect and evaluate its activities.

18. UNHCR would also devote particular attention to maintaining a human approach in its work since the Office dealt not only with concepts, policies and figures, but also, and much more importantly, with people.

19. Lastly, there was a need to make humanitarian operations more secure and improve the safety and security of refugees and staff working on their behalf. In that context, she wished to thank Government counterparts, regional organizations, partner agencies and UNHCR colleagues, whose contributions helped in sharing the responsibility for the well-being, and often the very lives, of more than 22 million of the most vulnerable human beings in the world.

20. **Mr. Zischg** (Austria), referring to the gap between relief operations and development activities, said that on various occasions, the Office's work in the field of refugee reintegration and reconstruction had been sharply criticized. In addition, development agencies and financial institutions frequently were not prepared to take over and ensure a transition between those operations and development activities. His delegation wished to know what measures

UNHCR was planning to take to ensure that the discussions on that question led to specific steps. He also wished to know how the Office intended to assist and protect displaced persons and what measures it had taken to apply in a specific manner the guiding principles formulated by the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons.

21. **Mr. Calovski** (The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) said that, on the preceding day, the Security Council had considered the question of refugees and their security. Efforts to strengthen international peace and security must by all means take into consideration the situation of the refugees. In that respect, the High Commissioner could count on his country's unreserved support. His Government would like to have further information on the medium- and long-term preventive activities envisaged by the Organization and UNHCR in order to deal with the problem of refugees and wished to know what the responsibilities of Member States would be in that regard. Conflict prevention was a very delicate matter, and all States must cooperate in order to put into practice the commitments made by the Organization in that field. His delegation expressed satisfaction with the priority given by the Office to preventive activities.

22. **Mr. van Rijssen** (Netherlands) said that the obligation to act within the framework established by the Convention was an additional problem for the Office, in view of the fact that large-scale population movements at the current time did not fall within the categories provided for under the Convention and that those persons were not able to receive international protection. That was compounded by the mixed flows made up of real refugees and persons whose situation did not justify protective measures. His delegation wished to know how, in the opinion of the High Commissioner, States should deal with that problem and what assistance could be provided to them by United Nations agencies.

23. **Mrs. Ogata** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that, with regard to the gap between relief operations and the start of development activities, although it was true that certain Governments had criticized the work carried out by the Office, others had understood that it was necessary to overcome that gap. Refugees returning to their country of origin after a conflict had to be integrated into the development process, which was a long and difficult undertaking, particularly because of the lack of financial resources. The Office was considering, together with other United Nations agencies, ways of ensuring a transition between emergency humanitarian operations and medium- and long-term development activities. Humanitarian operations, which applied to emergency situations and immediate crises, differed from development activities, which were undertaken only when the situation was stable and peace was restored; but stability, most often, was lacking. The gap between the two types of interventions was rooted in the fact that there was no existing resource at the international level to ensure the transition. Furthermore, since assistance was generally provided to Governments, the Governments themselves must have the necessary capacity to absorb the refugee flows and cope with post-conflict situations. Since the Office's policy to entrust the execution of certain activities to other United Nations agencies had not achieved the desired results, UNHCR was studying, with its partners, ways to enhance the system's effectiveness.

24. With regard to the question of displaced persons, the Office applied the guidelines formulated by the representative of the Secretary-General on internally displaced persons, particularly in Kosovo. Referring to refugees and protection for them, she stressed the role that could be played by the countries of asylum, the refugees' last resort. Nevertheless, in cases involving massive arrivals of refugees, intervention had to be carried out by other means, humanitarian, political and sometimes military ones. The prevention of such situations depended, therefore, on both Governments, which would strive to prevent the problem by combating poverty and endeavouring to maintain stability at the national level, and the international community. The problem of mixed flows of refugees essentially arose in industrialized countries, which had to cope with very large flows of economic refugees, as well as countries such as South Africa, which attracted immigrants from the entire African continent. Procedures must be established making it possible to distinguish between the various categories of immigrants in order to be able to identify real refugees and come to their aid, while at the same time bearing in mind that the problem of immigration would not thereby disappear.

25. **Mr. Venu** (India) said that the international community should pay closer attention to the cost of refugee aid and should help countries affected by refugee problems to assume their responsibilities. Noting the High Commissioner's appeal for greater international solidarity, he reaffirmed his Government's willingness to cooperate closely with UNHCR. He also asked what the High Commissioner expected of Member States and how they could help her to fulfil her mandate, particularly with respect to the search for lasting solutions to refugee problems and the strengthening of international solidarity.

26. **Mr. El-Aas** (Sudan) said that in many cases, displaced persons had originally been refugees. Those who returned to their country after conflicts often found that conditions there had changed and in some cases, worsened since their

departure. UNHCR and other agencies should endeavour to ensure conditions which would encourage refugees to return. Although his Government allowed certain types of refugees to live outside the camps, UNHCR did not provide it with the assistance needed to meet their needs in costly areas such as education and health. It was essential for States which hosted refugees and displaced persons to receive special assistance.

27. **Mr. De Palacio** (Spain) said that his Government attached particular importance to the security of humanitarian operations and workers and was prepared to help UNHCR and other agencies to improve the situation in the field. He requested further information on the measures taken by UNHCR in that regard and asked what steps States should take to provide UNHCR with effective support in that area.

28. **Mrs. Ogata** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that implementation of, and respect for, the Convention, which should be universally ratified, were a prerequisite for refugee protection. It was particularly important not only to guarantee the right to asylum, but also to meet the needs of those who required assistance rather than protection and, in particular, to protect minorities and provide necessary assistance to host countries. She thanked the Government of the Sudan, which had been hosting refugees for years. Because returnees had great difficulty reintegrating, the international community should increase its assistance to them. UNHCR had provided assistance to some refugees outside the camps, but it gave priority to those living in the camps because they fell under its direct responsibility.

29. It was important to ensure, not only the safety of humanitarian operations and workers, but also that of the victims of violence and displacement. The future Convention on the safety of United Nations and Associated Personnel was, therefore, a first step in that regard. The General Assembly might also consider developing a plan to protect humanitarian workers, particularly since there had been more casualties among civilian humanitarian workers than among peacekeeping soldiers in 1998.

30. **Mr. Ndiaye** (Senegal) asked whether the Secretary-General's proposal concerning the establishment of an international programme to assist countries of asylum in maintaining the security and neutrality of the camps and refugee assembly areas had, in fact, been implemented and whether there was any resource mobilization strategy for UNHCR activities.

31. **Mr. Burgess** (Ireland) said that he had noted with interest the High Commissioner's statement that the mechanism for international intervention in Kosovo could serve as a model framework in the search for solutions to the problem of displaced persons and that UNHCR played a distinct role from that of the verifiers in Kosovo. He wondered whether, in view of its staffing limitations, UNHCR was really in a position to provide coordination of activities and to play a distinct role. Because human rights violations were responsible for refugee flows, he requested information concerning the possibility of establishing a model framework for cooperation between UNHCR and agencies involved in human rights at field level.

32. **Mr. Meris** (Turkey) said that the High Commissioner had informed the Security Council of the danger posed by the increasingly frequent infiltration of refugee camps by soldiers and asked whether UNHCR had developed a code of conduct for dealing with such situations.

33. **Mr. Sjögren** (Sweden), referring to the reform programme to strengthen the Organization's humanitarian activities, which the Secretary-General had announced in 1997, requested an evaluation of existing mechanisms and asked whether they could be improved.

34. **Mrs. Ogata** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that UNHCR was cooperating closely with the Department of Peacekeeping Operations in its search for ways to guarantee the civilian nature and neutrality of refugee camps. Responsibility for maintaining security in the camps fell on the host countries, which, it was true, did not always have the necessary means and should therefore be provided with assistance. In the medium term, there was a need to establish regional peacekeeping capacities modelled on the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG). Ultimately, the Security Council and some Member States planned to establish standby forces. In reply to the point raised by the representative of Ireland, she said that, owing to the violence in Kosovo, it was necessary not only to provide assistance to the growing number of displaced persons but also to restore security in the country, which was not within the scope of UNHCR. The agreement concluded between the Government and OSCE concerning the sending of a mission to verify the Government's fulfilment of its commitment to reduce military forces and, by so doing, to restore public confidence, was therefore encouraging. The mechanism which had been established had two elements: the humanitarian element, which involved the provision of direct assistance to populations by humanitarian organizations, including UNHCR, and the security element, which would be carried out at field level by civilian verifiers. With regard to inter-agency cooperation, she said that UNHCR was cooperating closely with the Office of the High

Commissioner for Human Rights since human rights violations were a principal cause of refugee flows. Reform had led to increased cooperation through the intermediary of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

35. **Archbishop Martino** (Observer for the Holy See) noted that refugees were no longer the by-product of a conflict but in many cases were its very substance and scope, as shown by the strategies of ethnic cleansing, attempts at total annihilation of communities, attacks on refugee camps and all acts aimed at blocking humanitarian aid from reaching the refugees, the most affected being at the same time the most vulnerable, namely, women, children and the aged. In addition to the 25 million refugees in the strict sense, there were large numbers of people who had been internally displaced in their own countries as a result of conflict, at risk of starvation, disease and violence of all kinds, unprotected by any legal or institutional mechanism and unable to benefit from the assistance of the international community.

36. Humanitarian aid workers and organizations deserved the recognition and commendation of the international community. But, however crucial it might be, humanitarian aid should be seen only as a temporary emergency provision, and could not replace the necessary political will to solve the problem that was at the heart of the refugee situation.

37. The whole question of refugees also had serious moral implications. Behind every conflict there was a long story of continued and systematic violation of fundamental human rights. The best method to prevent conflict was to create respect for the dignity of the human person and guarantees for human rights. Moreover, stopping the illegal flow of weapons would cause many conflicts to subside.

38. Behind the immediate causes of flight there might also be economic and social factors. States had a special responsibility in orienting their policies towards a participatory and environment-friendly development. That task must, however, be shared by the private sector and the international community through a renewed effort of cooperation for development.

39. The right of refugees to protection and to return in security and dignity should be guaranteed. However, the issue of displacement was not only a matter of humanitarian concern; it was also a matter of international peace and stability. Along with peace-making and peacekeeping, concrete action towards peace-building became a must in such situations.

40. **Mr. Sucharipa** (Austria), speaking on behalf of the European Union, the associated countries Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia emphasized the difficult and dangerous conditions under which UNHCR staff often discharged their duties, and demanded the immediate release of Mr. Cochetel, held in captivity in North Ossetia for 286 days.

41. He noted that UNHCR currently faced a number of crises, particularly the large-scale human displacements in Kosovo, West Africa and the Great Lakes region. There was a need for concerted international efforts to better support UNHCR in its task of providing adequate protection for refugees. While it was true that the countries of origin, countries of asylum and other affected countries must show solidarity and burden-sharing, the primary responsibility for protecting refugees lay with the host country. Therefore, international solidarity and burden-sharing could not be the pretext for ignoring the fundamental principle of non-refoulement. The European Union unreservedly supported the right of asylum and found it inadmissible that the principle of non-refoulement was often violated.

42. States must also address the root causes of displacement. Respect for human rights, notably the rights of minorities, as well as good governance based on democratic principles were crucial. If States were unable to prevent displacement, they had the duty to facilitate voluntary repatriation of their own citizens in safety and dignity, as well as their reintegration.

43. The European Union shared the concern of UNHCR over the numerous and serious breaches of refugee and human-rights law as well as international humanitarian law. States must assume their responsibilities under international law, and the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol remained the cornerstone of refugee protection. The European Union reiterated its appeal to all States that had not yet done so to accede to and implement fully those instruments as well as regional instruments. The recent decision of UNHCR to promote a dialogue with both developed and developing countries on protection issues, as well as the initiative recently announced by the Executive Committee to promote accession to the Convention and the Protocol, were a welcome step.

44. Composite flows posed particular challenges for refugee protection. It was important to differentiate between refugees who fled for their lives or liberty — for whom fair and efficient procedures were needed — and those who left their country in the hopes of finding a better life. Anyone who had a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons

of race, religion, nationality, membership of a social group or political opinion should receive adequate protection. It would be appropriate to develop complementary protection systems tailored to today's needs and challenges. However, the fact that some individuals abused asylum procedures with the aim of evading regular immigration procedures impaired the receptivity of local populations toward genuine refugees, threatened to bring the notion of asylum into discredit, and might negatively influence asylum policies and practices at the national level.

45. The European Union encouraged UNHCR to strengthen further its collaboration with the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and other relevant bodies and mechanisms, as well as with non-governmental organizations. Preventive action was needed, since violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in peace and in times of conflict were one of the principal reasons for refugee flows and a serious obstacle to return in safety and dignity.

46. The European Union condemned all forms of violence and discrimination against displaced women and girls, as well as violations of the rights of refugee children. It called on all States to take the necessary measures to end those violations and to ensure that their human rights and physical and psychological integrity were protected.

47. In Kosovo, the conflict between government forces and Kosovar armed groups had caused some 300,000 people, the majority of them women and children, to flee their homes. The European Union hoped that the agreements signed in Belgrade on 15 and 16 October 1998 would pave the way for a lasting settlement. It also welcomed the Memorandum of Understanding signed in Vienna on 15 October 1998 by UNHCR and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The two bodies would have to work closely with other relevant international organizations to bring about peace in the region and ease the plight of people displaced by the conflict.

48. In post-conflict situations it was of the utmost urgency to create a climate of peace, security and reconciliation, to develop acceptable living and working conditions, to expedite reconstruction and development efforts and to rebuild a civil society in order to enable refugees to return as early as possible. States and all political, humanitarian and economic actors therefore needed to develop comprehensive strategies to address the needs of the populations concerned. The attempts made thus far to bridge the relief-to-development gap and to involve development agencies and financial institutions from the onset of a crisis had yielded only modest results. The return process should have a positive impact on peace and reconciliation in the country concerned.

49. It should be noted that the European Union had been collectively the largest donor in recent years, for in 1997 the 15 member States and the European Commission had together contributed $333 million to UNHCR, i.e., about 42 per cent of the funds received from government sources. The European Union had taken due note of the High Commissioner's concern about the difficult funding situation and of her plea for greater flexibility and predictability of resources. In that context, UNHCR should seek to broaden its donor base.

50. It was also of the utmost importance that available funds were used in the most effective manner. The European Union welcomed the endeavours of UNHCR to further improve accountability and to remedy shortcomings, especially those relating to the budget, in accordance with the recommendations of the Board of Auditors, ACABQ and the Fifth Committee, and trusted that those efforts would enable it to perform its tasks more efficiently.

51. Despite its management problems, UNHCR deserved the political and financial backing of the international community and would continue to receive the full support of the European Union.

52. **Ms. Taft** (United States of America) observed that the crises in Sierra Leone, Kosovo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo had increased the number of refugees and that refugees were no longer properly protected in many parts of the world.

53. The United States believed that implementation of the principles of international solidarity was essential to the building of a world where refugee protection and the search for durable solutions were no longer empty words. Her country appealed to those States which had not yet become parties to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol to do so without delay. Protecting refugees should be seen as a shared responsibility rather than a shared burden.

54. International solidarity entailed more than the contribution of funds. The contribution of host countries, particularly those in the developing world, which shared their territory and resources with the refugees, was the most important of all. Sharing responsibility meant much more than sharing the financial costs; it meant sharing the responsibility for finding solutions to the conflicts and human rights abuses that created the refugee problem. No country, rich or poor, could avoid that political responsibility.

55. It was important to ensure the civilian character of refugee camps by locating them away from borders, disarming armed elements in the camps, separating the military from the general population and deploying professional military or police units to ensure security. The situation of the Sierra Leone refugees in the camps situated in the border areas of Guinea and Liberia was cause for concern and her country was therefore glad that the Secretary-General had recommended the development of new mechanisms for camp protection.

56. Another disturbing and unacceptable development was the disparate standards of protection accorded to different groups of refugees. All refugees were entitled to be treated alike, in conformity with international human rights standards.

57. Women and children should be accorded special attention in the planning and programming of protection and assistance. Although progress had been made, much remained to be done, especially in the field.

58. The security of humanitarian personnel was another cause for concern. The increase in the killing and kidnapping of such personnel throughout the world demonstrated an unacceptable erosion of respect for the fundamental principles of humanitarian assistance. Her delegation, citing the case of Vincent Cochetel as an example, appealed to all States and other actors to comply with both the letter and the spirit of international humanitarian law.

59. The United States was pleased that UNHCR had recognized the importance of the resettlement of refugees as an instrument of protection and was working more closely with the United States on the latter's resettlement programme, particularly in Africa.

60. Her Government encouraged UNHCR to continue working more closely with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and other human rights institutions, while maintaining a clear differentiation of mandates.

61. With regard to the funding shortfalls of UNHCR, the financial and material costs inherent in the protection of refugees should be shared more widely within the international community. Her Government, which in the fiscal year 1998 had contributed $250,000 to the General Programmes and the Special Programmes, would continue to contribute to both kinds of programme early in 1999, and hoped that other countries would follow suit.

62. The solution to the refugee problem lay not in the type of assistance provided nor in the amount of funding contributed, but rather in ensuring peace throughout the world.

63. **Mr. Dos Santos** (Mozambique), speaking on behalf of the States members of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC), said that the problem of refugees was a particularly acute one in Africa since, in 1996 alone, there had been more than 8 million refugees, returnees and displaced persons. The Community agreed with the High Commissioner that more emphasis should be placed on the causes of the problem and it believed that greater use should be made of preventive diplomacy in order to avoid conflicts and the resulting large number of refugees.

64. He referred to the delicate problems caused by the presence of refugees (mentioned in paragraph 27 of document A/53/328) and recalled that the High Commissioner had emphasized that it was necessary and feasible to reconcile the protection of refugees with the interests of national security (para. 25). In connection with the need to maintain the purely civilian character of refugee camps and to exclude all those who did not qualify for refugee status, he stressed that most countries of asylum did not have the capacity to undertake that exercise and therefore called for assistance from the international community.

65. The Council of Ministers of SADC, at its meeting at Maputo in January 1998, had agreed that a regional mechanism should be established to safeguard the rights of refugees. Working groups had been formed to make proposals on how to address the problem of refugees, returnees and displaced persons and of illegal immigrants in southern Africa. It was envisaged that it would be a joint initiative of SADC, UNHCR and ILO.

66. While it welcomed the increase in voluntary repatriation, SADC was concerned about the new refugee outflows precipitated by the latest conflicts which had erupted in the region. It was important for UNHCR, the countries involved and the international community to work together in close cooperation to ensure that the repatriation of refugees did not give rise to new problems in the countries in which they were resettled.

67. On the basis of the memorandum of understanding signed between SADC and UNHCR in 1996, the two bodies had been working together to find lasting solutions to the problems of urban refugees in southern Africa. UNHCR had been supporting vocational training and business loans or micro-credits, as well as the local integration of refugees.

68. Refugee problems required cooperation between various partners and SADC noted with particular satisfaction the ties established between UNHCR and the World Bank,

the African Development Bank, the World Food Programme and the United Nations Development Programme.

69. The Community welcomed the various initiatives that had been taken to improve emergency preparedness and response, and urged the OAU Commission on Refugees to continue to cooperate with UNHCR in the search for durable solutions. It noted with satisfaction that UNHCR participated in the meetings of the Commission and had intensified its support for OAU in connection with early warning and conflict prevention. The Community had also taken note with appreciation of the recommendations of the regional meeting on refugee issues, held in Kampala in May 1998. It thanked UNHCR for having helped the OAU Commission to prepare for the ministerial meeting on refugees, which was to be held in Khartoum in December 1998, and expressed the hope that on that occasion the African countries would propose concrete measures to resolve the refugee problem.

70. Since the presence of refugees weighed heavily on the resources of the host countries, the international community should assist those countries. The Community urged the international community to continue to provide voluntary contributions to UNHCR and called upon the countries of origin of the refugees to eradicate conditions that led to the outflow of refugees. It also highly commended the High Commissioner and her staff for their dedication to the cause of refugees and reaffirmed its commitment to continue to seek durable solutions to the problem, which had a negative impact on the development of the African continent.

71. **Mr. Kolby** (Norway) said that, while the International Criminal Court would, in accordance with its statute, have an important role to play in order to ensure the security of humanitarian staff, additional measures would nevertheless have to be taken to increase respect for international humanitarian law and the protection of humanitarian workers. In that connection, he referred to the proposals which the Secretary-General had submitted to the Security Council on the question (S/1998/883). His delegation welcomed the fact that a dialogue had been initiated in recent years between the Security Council and UNHCR on relevant conflicts.

72. With regard to Kosovo, while the signing of the Belgrade Agreement in October 1998 had given rise to hopes for peace, the international community should nevertheless mobilize to support UNHCR in its task of protection; humanitarian workers could not alone assume the responsibility for a political crisis with humanitarian consequences. His delegation wholeheartedly supported the role of lead agency given to UNHCR, while recognizing the importance of the presence of other United Nations agencies, ICRC and non-governmental organizations in the field, which should continue to support the coordination mechanisms now in place.

73. As current Chairman-in-Office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, Norway had sought to increase cooperation with UNHCR; that cooperation would be of great importance in Kosovo and the Balkans, in the Transcaucasian region and in the member countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States. In that connection, SADC welcomed the recent signing of a memorandum of understanding between the two organizations.

74. His delegation deplored the decline in the protection of refugees, especially in the Great Lakes region, and welcomed the strengthening of the role of OAU in ensuring that the countries of the region respected the internationally recognized principles in that area.

75. The renewed conflict in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, which was producing a new wave of internally displaced persons, required increased efforts on the part of the United Nations and regional organizations. Unfortunately, conflicts continued in West Africa, as did the atrocities inflicted on civilians and refugees.

76. States should respect the fundamental principles of the law of asylum and non-refoulement. At the beginning of 1998, Norway had extended the right of asylum to persons persecuted by non-State actors and to those persecuted on grounds of their gender or sexual orientation. The 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol relating to the status of refugees remained the basic instruments of refugee protection for Norway, and it called upon all Governments which had not yet acceded to them to do so.

77. Voluntary repatriation and local integration were the preferred solutions for refugees. In order to prevent further displacement, therefore, it was important to ensure that refugees were reintegrated into society. From that standpoint, it was essential to enhance coordination between the countries concerned, UNHCR and the development and human rights partners and to continue the dialogue with the Bretton Woods institutions. Resettlement, which was a solution of last resort, was sometimes essential. Norway had therefore recently increased its annual quota for the resettlement of refugees in the country by 50 per cent and it encouraged other countries to follow suit.

78. It was regrettable that the financial resources of UNHCR were declining at a time when the scope of its task was expanding. It was to be hoped that, by strengthening transparency and accountability, *inter alia* through the new budget procedures, UNHCR would be able to improve its situation.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.